

**Remarks at the House Democratic Caucus Retreat**

*January 14, 2010*

Thank you, House of Representatives. Please, everybody have a seat. Have a seat.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. To Xavier, thank you; Jim Clyburn; outstanding work by Chris Van Hollen; and of course, Steny Hoyer. To all the leadership, to all the Members, thank you for inviting me here today. Thank you.

The House of Representatives has been an incredible partner throughout this year, but I hope you don't mind me singling out one of the best partners any President could ever have, and that is your unbelievable Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi. I was out in California doing—I think it was a DNC event, and Nancy introduced me, and I said, you know, Nancy, she's smart, she's articulate, she knows her issues. But what people don't understand is, Nancy is tough. *[Laughter]* She is tough. And she is tough for her Members, for this caucus, and she's tough for the American people. And so—*[applause]*—her extraordinary leadership is one of the reasons why the House of Representatives has consistently set the bar on a whole host of issues that—and legislative accomplishments that we've seen this year and—this past year and that we're going to see this year coming up.

Now, before I begin, I want to give all of you a quick update on our urgent efforts to save lives and support the recovery in Haiti. Our, obviously, thoughts and prayers go out to all the people of Haiti; Haitian Americans who have family members. One of my top advisers, Patrick Gaspard, is Haitian American. He's got cousins and aunts and uncles who are still missing. His family priest, who he's known since he was a baby, who baptized him, is suspected dead. Those stories ripple throughout the Haitian American community, but obviously they ripple throughout all humanity when we see the kind of tragedy that we're seeing.

I want everybody here to understand that I've directed my administration to take swift and coordinated and aggressive action. I've made it clear to my national security team that this has to be a top priority across agencies—Department of Defense, Department of State, USAID. All the agencies involved—Homeland Security, our FEMA director—they are all intimately involved in making sure that we can get in there as quickly as possible to engage in search and rescue and to provide immediate medical attention, and then long-term help with the recovery.

Now, our highest priority is the safety of American citizens, and we are currently airlifting injured Americans out of Haiti. I know many of you have constituents desperate for news of their loved ones, and you should direct them to the State Department web site for a phone number and e-mail address and let them know that we will not rest until we have accounted for every single of our fellow Americans that are in harm's way.

The first wave of our rescue and relief workers arrived on the ground yesterday. Search and rescue teams are now working around the clock to save lives. More waves of major assets are going to be arriving. This morning I announced an immediate investment of \$100 million to support our relief efforts in the early days of this crisis. Most of this is for the basics: lifesaving equipment, food, water, medicine. This investment will grow over the year as we help our neighbors embark on what is going to be a long-term recovery.

And so I just want everybody in the House of Representatives to understand, this is a moment for American leadership. This is a time when the world looks to us and they say, given

our capacity, given our unique capacity to project power around the world, that we have to project that not just for our own interests, but for the interests of the world as a whole. And my national security team understands that I will not put up with any excuses for us not doing the very best in this time of tragedy.

Now, it is good to be here with all of you. I want to make a guarantee that 2010 will not be a boring year. *[Laughter]* Let me also say this: 2010 will mark a year of remarkable progress for the American people. And much of the reason for that is because of actions that were taken by the House of Representatives.

I just want everybody to go back, because sometimes in this town memories are short. When this Congress convened a year ago, after 8 years of failed policies and decades of broken politics, we faced down the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. So we knew that we were going to confront an unprecedented battery of challenges, not to mention long-simmering problems that had been put off for decades. We knew the solutions would not be quick and they would not be easy and they would not always be popular. But we made a decision that we were going to govern. There was—there were easier paths to take, because we knew that when I was sworn in, for example, we had already lost 650,000 jobs; we were going to lose another 700,000 jobs the month I was sworn in; the next month, 650,000 jobs. We knew that the recovery coming out of this extraordinary recession was going to be long and hard, and the easiest thing to do would have been to not take tough decisions and simply to point fingers. There is a long and hallowed tradition in Washington of doing that.

But that's not what you did. And think about what's happened as a consequence. In one of America's darkest hours, you answered the call. Time and again you stood up and you led. And thanks to what you did we can say now what we couldn't say a year ago: that America is moving forward again. The economy is growing. Job losses have slowed to a trickle. Job losses over the last quarter of 2009 were still unacceptable, but they were one-tenth of what we endured in the first quarter.

So you have a lot to be proud of, but let's be honest with each other. I mean, this is still a tough environment for a huge number of Americans. This is a tough time for this country. I know that what you've seen in your districts, the same thing that I've seen in towns across this country, the same thing I read about in letters each and every day: pain and anxiety and sometimes anger felt by our friends and our constituents and our fellow Americans.

There are 7 million Americans out there who have lost their jobs over the past 2 years and they still need our help. What they can expect from this administration, and I know what they can expect from you, is that we are going to have a sustained and relentless focus over the next several months on accelerating the pace of job creation, because that's priority number one.

Last month, I outlined the next steps that I believe we have to take to spur job creation, and the House has already acted on many of these: first, tax breaks and loans to help accelerate small-business hiring; second, additional investment in putting people to work modernizing our national infrastructure; third, incentives for consumers to make their homes more energy efficient, which doesn't just create jobs, but also saves consumers money and puts us on the path of energy independence. And I want to thank all of you for stepping up to pass a jobs bill along these lines.

Now, if these were ordinary times, the legislative victories of this Congress, the ones we've already accomplished, would be historic by any measure. Think about the enormous challenges

we faced. That explains why some of the things we already did haven't gotten as much attention as they deserve.

What's so amazing, though, is out of the major initiatives we were talking about before we took office, you've either completed or set the stage for almost all of them. Because of what you did, we cut taxes for small businesses and 95 percent of working Americans, just as we said we would. Because of what you did, women now are getting equal pay for equal work. Because of what you did, 4 million children now have health insurance that didn't have it before.

Our veterans know that they're going to be taken care of in a way that had been neglected for too long. Before—because of what you did, there will finally be new rules preventing credit card companies from ripping off Americans and tobacco companies from targeting our children. And there are new laws in place to protect consumers from mortgage fraud and predatory lending. Because of what you did, young people and old people alike have new pathways to serve this country through our national service legislation. Because of what you did, we've strengthened protections against hate crimes based solely on who you are or what you look like or who you love.

We made historic investments—I know Eric Schmidt's here today—an extraordinary leader in our corporate community and in our technology communities—he knows what we've done in science and technology and a clean energy economy: historic investments, the largest that have ever been made. We made historic investments in education so that we're fully prepared to win the race for the 21st century.

We reformed our defense spending to cut out waste and save taxpayers billions of dollars while keeping us safe. I don't know if you saw today, the Washington Times, not known for a big promoter of the Obama agenda, pointed out that we had succeeded where previous administrations had failed because of the work that was done here in this Congress to finally get serious on some of these spending cuts that had been talked about for years. And this House passed commonsense financial regulatory reform to help prevent a crisis like this from ever happening again.

So each achievement represents promises kept. And we're not stopping. Today we are on the doorstep of accomplishing something that Washington has been talking about since Teddy Roosevelt was President, and that is reforming health care and health insurance here in America.

Now, believe me, I know how big a lift this has been. I see the polls. I get 40,000 letters every day, and I read a stack of them each night. I catch the occasional blog post or cable clip that breathlessly declares what something means for a political party, without really talking much about what it means for a country. I know that the virtues of this legislation for Americans with insurance and Americans without it have been entirely obscured by fear and distraction.

But I also know what happens once we get this done, once we sign this law—sign this bill into law. The American people will suddenly learn that this bill does things they like and doesn't do things that people have been trying to say it does. The worst fears will prove groundless, and the American people's hope for a fair shake from their insurance companies for quality, affordable health care they need will finally be realized.

This year alone, this reform will ban some of the worst practices of the insurance industry forever. They'll no longer be allowed to refuse coverage for preexisting conditions for children or drop coverage when folks get sick and need it the most. They'll no longer be allowed to

impose restrictive annual limits on the amount of coverage that you receive, lifetime limits on the amounts of benefits received. They'll be required to offer free preventive care, like checkups and routine tests and mammograms, at no cost. Patients will have rights. They will get what they pay for. And that's just the beginning.

All told, it's reform that finally offers Americans the security of knowing that they'll have quality, affordable health care whether they lose their job or change their job or they get sick. And by the way, it's reform that begins to bring down costs for families and businesses and governments.

And for those of you who are concerned about the deficit, when you've got the Congressional Budget Office that says in the second 10 years this brings down the deficit by a trillion dollars, in the first 10 years it brings it down by over \$100 billion, you have nothing to apologize for when it comes to talking about deficit reduction. The irresponsible thing would have been to do nothing, and that's not what you've decided to do. This represents the biggest step towards deficit reduction in years.

So, I know everybody in the media is all in a tizzy: "Oh, what's this going to mean politically?" Well, let me tell you something. If Republicans want to campaign against what we've done by standing up for the status quo and for insurance companies over American families and businesses, that is a fight I want to have. If their best idea is to return to the bad policies and the bad ideas of yesterday, they are going to lose that argument. What are they going to say, "Well, you know, the old system really worked well; let's go back to the way it was"? That's not going to appeal to seniors who are now seeing the possibility of that doughnut hole finally closing, and so they can finally get discounts on their prescriptions. That's not going to appeal to the small businesses who find out all the tax credits that they're going to get for doing right by their employees, something that they have been wanting to do, but may not have been able to afford. It's not going to be very appealing to Americans who, for the first time, are going to find out that they can provide coverage to their children, their dependents, all the way up to the age of 26 or 27.

And that's why I'll be out there waging a great campaign from one end of the country to the other, telling Americans with insurance or without insurance what they stand to gain; about the arsenal of consumer protections; about the long-awaited stability that they're going to begin to experience. And I'm going to tell them that I am proud we are putting the future of America before the politics of the moment, the next generation before the next election. And that, after all, is what we were sent up here to do: standing up for the American people against the special interests, solve problems that we've been talking about for decades, make their lives a little bit better, make tough choices sometimes when they're unpopular. And that's something that every one of you who support this bill can be proud to campaign on in November.

Now, I know that some of the fights we've been going through have been tough. I know that some of you have gotten beaten up at home. Some of the fights that we're going to go through this year are going to be tough as well. But just remember why each of us got into public service in the first place: We found something that was worth fighting for. There was something we thought was important enough that we were willing to stand up in the public square, risk loss, risk embarrassment, because we knew in our hearts that something wasn't right, that we weren't, in some measure, living up to the American ideal, and that we thought that if we got involved and engaged in the democratic process, somehow we could make it a little bit better.

We've asked the American people for the chance to lead at this defining moment, and they have entrusted that extraordinary privilege to us. And if we live up to that responsibility, if we're fighting for the American people with the same sense of urgency that they feel in their own lives, then I am absolutely confident we're going to be able to look back at the end of this year and say that things are getting better; that we've reignited confidence in our economy, in America, and in each other; that we've restored a sense of responsibility here in Washington; and that, above all, we've begun to renew the American Dream and keep it alive, not just for this time, but for all time.

That's what you did last year. That's what I want you to join me in doing this year and all the years to come.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:15 p.m. in the Visitor Center at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Xavier Becerra of California; Assistant to the President for Political Affairs Patrick H. Gaspard; and Eric Schmidt, chairman of the board and chief executive officer, Google Inc.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Congress :: House of Representatives, Democratic caucus retreat.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Becerra, Xavier; Clyburn, James E.; Fugate, W. Craig; Gaspard, Patrick H.; Hoyer, Steny H.; Pelosi, Nancy; Schmidt, Eric; Van Hollen, Christopher, Jr.

*Subjects:* Budget, Federal : Deficit; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Business and industry : Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility, and Disclosure Act of 2009; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Civil rights : Hate crimes prevention legislation; Civil rights : Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009; Congress : House of Representatives :: Democratic caucus retreat; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Defense, Department of : Budgetary discipline; Disaster assistance : Haiti earthquake, Federal assistance ; Disaster assistance : Haiti earthquake, Federal assistance; Economy, national : Financial regulations, modernization efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Education : Global competitiveness; Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Energy efficiency, tax incentives; Energy : Energy-efficient homes and buildings; Energy : Foreign sources; Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act of 2009; Haiti : American civilians affected by the earthquake, efforts to locate and rescue; Haiti : Earthquake, damage and recovery efforts; Haiti : U.S. assistance; Health and Human Services, Department of : State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Employer-based health insurance coverage; Health and medical care : Health insurance, protection of coverage; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Preventive care and public health programs; Health and medical care : Seniors, prescription drug benefits; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Housing : Fraud Enforcement and Recovery Act of 2009 ; Natural disasters : Haiti, earthquake; Science and technology : Research and development; Taxation : Tax relief; Transportation : Highway system, modernization efforts; Veterans : Benefits; White House Office : Assistants to

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